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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2008

In Today's Papers

Court of Appeals Releases Declaration Regarding Closure Case

All news outlets report the Court of Appeals (Yargitay) officially denounced negative reactions to the closure case against the ruling AKP. The Court saw this behavior "as an indication of the reluctance to accept the independence of the judiciary." The statement emphasized what it views as "systematic assaults" that target the judiciary. In addition, the Court underscored its view that attempts to harm the basic principles of the republic had intensified recently, and "attempts to change the constitution are in line with the demands of a certain political ideology," which "caused serious tension." The declaration also called Chief Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya's indictment, which charges the AKP with anti-secular activities, an "institutional document."

Mainstream Hurriyet says the declaration was released "To respond to the domestic and international accusations targeting the judiciary." Mainstream Vatan says on its front page, "The Declaration Told The Government It Cannot Do Whatever It Wants."

Leftist Taraf calls the declaration a "coup attempt" against a civic administration. The pro-government Sabah writes, "The declaration resembles the April 27 e-memorandum released by the military General Staff (TGS) during the process of selecting a new president." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports, "The Court of Appeals was pressuring the Constitutional Court to close down the AKP." A commentary in mainstream Vatan reports, "The declaration was triggered when the government submitted its judicial reform draft to EU Commissioner Olli Rehn without first consulting the Turkish judiciary."

Editorial Commentary on the 'Yargitay' Statement

"The Judiciary and Politics"
Taha Akyol observed in mainstream Milliyet (5/22): "The

Court of Appeals (Yargitay) Presidents' Committee issued a very harsh statement that actually defends the indictment against the AKP. I agree with only one section of yesterday's Yargitay statement. The draft law on judicial reforms should be discussed with our own judicial institutions before it is presented to EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn. Nevertheless, the committee should remember the principles which establish the Judiciary's nonpartisanship. In democracies, there should be no judicial oligarchy. Both the government and the judiciary should avoid politicizing such issues."

European Parliament Ratifies Its Report on Turkey's EU Reform Process

All papers report on Wednesday, the European Parliament approved its report on Turkey, which was drafted by Dutch Rapporteur Ria Oomen-Ruijten. The non-binding report addresses 28 issues, including the May Day events, article 301, the closure case against the AKP, and the Ergenekon investigation. The report criticizes the police's disproportional use of force during May Day celebrations in Istanbul. In addition, the report calls the changes to Article 301 of Turkish Penal Code "insufficient," and urges the Turkish Parliament to revise the article and also "remove all other restrictive provisions in the penal code." The report also expresses concern about the potential consequences if the AKP is closed, and calls for the Constitutional Court to act in accordance with the Venice Commission guidelines and European standards on the prohibition of political parties. It also urges the pro-

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Kurdish DTP to "distance themselves from violence and terrorist organizations." While encouraging Turkish authorities to "resolutely pursue investigations into the Ergenekon affair," the report also advises Turkey to "fully uncover the Ergenekon networks that reach into state structures, and to bring those involved to justice." The report welcomes the recent adoption by the Turkish Parliament of the law on non-Muslim minority foundations and says, "The European Commission should analyze whether the law addresses all shortcomings faced by non-Muslim religious communities with regard to property management and acquisition, including expropriated property sold to third parties." Finally, the report recommends action regarding Cyprus, noting, "A withdrawal of Turkish forces would facilitate the negotiation of a settlement."

Mainstream Milliyet finds the report "balanced," saying that unlike earlier reports, this time the European Parliament draws a "complete and clear picture of Turkey." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak carries the headline, "EP Report Urges Turkey to Combat Ergenekon Network." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet carries the headline, "The EU, Once Again, Intervenes and Criticizes The Closure Case Against AKP," but notes, "The report criticizes police for using disproportional force against demonstrators on May 1st." Mainstream Hurriyet writes in, "Three Calls To Turkey," that the report "expresses anxiety concerning the AKP closure case and calls the amendments to article 301 insufficient." Mainstream Sabah writes, "The report wants Turkey to pursue reforms in human rights and democracy," while "The events of May 1st were also highlighted." Mainstream Vatan calls the report's suggestions "Three Important Warnings From the European Parliament to Turkey," and notes, "The secular government and the constitutional court were called on to show the highest respect for the law," and in reference to the May 1st events, "Civil rights must be protected." Leftist Taraf writes, "From the European Parliament Comes Both Praise and Criticism," as "The report was approved by a wide margin of votes," and "the DTP was called on to place distance between itself and the PKK."

Turkey Mediates Israel-Syria Peace Talks in Istanbul
All papers report Israel and Syria announced yesterday the

beginning of indirect peace talks under Turkey's mediation in Istanbul. Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) Deputy Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu and Turkish PM's Chief Advisor Ahmet Davutoglu joined the talks between the delegations led by Israeli government advisors Yoram Turbovitz and Shalom Turjeman and Syrian Foreign Ministry advisor Riyad Davudi. Mainstream Hurriyet writes in "Middle East's Eye is on Istanbul," that "Israel and Syria announced indirect negotiations have started under Turkey's auspices," adding "parties were discussing possibilities for the return of Golan Heights to Damascus in exchange for a lasting peace settlement." Hurriyet also writes, "Israel and Syria took Ankara's suggestion for peace talks after eight years," and "the delegations will stay in three separate hotels," and "will not meet each other one-on-one without the Turkish delegation." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports in, "Turkey is the Official Mediator" that "the peace talks are at a preliminary stage to see if the ground is solid enough to continue. Both sides agreed to continue the dialogue within the framework of the Madrid Conference principles." Liberal Radikal writes in "Turkey is the Bridge Between Israel and Syria," that "officials from both sides will come to Istanbul regularly to continue indirect negotiations." In "The World Praises Ankara," mainstream Milliyet notes leaders from the U.S., the EU, and the UN thanked Turkey for their efforts and called the

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efforts, "useful." Leftist Taraf writes, "Istanbul Hosts Israeli-Syrian Peace," and "Israel and Syria thanked Prime Minister Erdogan for his efforts."

Yeni Safak reports the U.S. State Department "praised Turkey's role" and stressed the U.S. had "no role" in this process. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports that the U.S. praised Turkey for its mediation in talks between Israel and Syria. Mainstream Milliyet notes David Welch, A/S Bureau of Middle East Affairs said "I think Turkey played a good and useful role in this regard." The paper also quotes White House Spokesperson Dana Perino saying that "the U.S. did not participate in the talks and it was Israel's decision." U.S. Embassy Spokesman Kathy Schalow said that the U.S. appreciates Turkey's continued efforts to play constructive role in the region.

Editorial Commentary on Syria-Israel Peace Talks

"In the End, Turkey Succeeded"

Erdal Safak commented in mainstream Sabah (5/22): "Peace talks between Syria and Israel were officially announced yesterday. Turkey has mediated indirect talks between the two countries for the last four years. Certainly, Ankara will not be able to continue mediating between the two countries on its own. After a certain point, the U.S. will get involved and take some responsibility. As a matter of fact, other important actors such as the EU and Russia should support these talks. Nevertheless, as the only country trusted by both Israel and Syria, Turkey has earned a position of strength in the Middle East, a trump card with the EU, and prestige in the world. If a peace agreement is reached as a result of talks, then, Turkey's strength and prestige will reach extraordinary levels."

Northern Iraqi Kurdish Delegation Meets AKP in Ankara Hurriyet, Milliyet, Cumhuriyet, Radikal, Yeni Safak and others report that on Tuesday, a delegation from the Kurdish regional parliament in northern Iraq met with the ruling AKP deputy chair Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat, Egemen Bagis, and AKP Diyarbakir MP Ihsan Arslan to discuss ties. In the Kurdish delegation were Arez Abdullah from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK,) Heme Resit Maweti from Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU,) and Hamza Eminoglu from KIU's Turkey representation. Both sides stressed the existing problems needed to be resolved through peaceful ways. The Kurds asked for more Turkish investments in northern Iraq. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet says Kurds

invited the AKP to visit the Kurdish Parliament in northern Iraq, and AKP accepted.

Editorial Commentary on Iran

"If the US Attacks Iran, What Will Turkey Do?"

Cuneyt Ulsever commented in mainstream Hurriyet (5/22):

"Due to our obsession with the turban controversy and the AKP closure case, Turkey is unable to see the big danger that is so close to us. Aside from the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Iran is the most successful state on the road to becoming an imperial power in the Middle East. Iran's Shiites scare Sunnis in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. Lately, not only the U.S., but many western countries, including the UK, Germany, and France, believe that Iran is making progress toward its ability to develop nuclear weapons. Once Iran completes its nuclear program, a new Middle East will be established and Turkey's position in the region, and in the world, will decline. Some experts in the West think that Ahmedinejad will be voted out of

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office in 2009. The nationalists may come to power and for this reason the administration in Iran may want the U.S. or Israel to attack Iran in order to legitimize Ahmedinejad's stance against the West. During all these developments, suppose the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan faces the question, 'Strategic partner, we have decided to attack Iran, are you with us or not?' What would his answer be?"

TV Highlights

NTV

Domestic News

- Following a dysentery outbreak in the province of Aksaray last week, on Wednesday dysentery cases were reported also in Adana province. The Health Ministry stated there was no typhoid, dysentery or cholera epidemic in Aksaray.
- The Istanbul Governor's Office said the Selah shipyard in Tuzla will be shut down due to recent fatal work accidents.
- The Competition Board said there was no need for an investigation regarding the state-owned bank loans granted to the Calik Group in the acquisition of Sabah-ATV media group.

International News

- Turkish and Greek Cypriot representatives met Wednesday to review working groups' progress in an attempt to pave the way for talks to reunify the divided island.
- Lebanon will hold presidential elections on May 25.
- Garbage is used to produce energy to power 2,500 homes in Southern California.

WILSON